‘Analysis of the media’

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Linguistic analysis of media discourse is often described as ‘media stylistics’. This may seem an obvious choice of expression, but unless examined it can obscure complexity in what approaches to the analysis of media consist of, as well as what they are for. ‘Media stylistics’ is of interest, it is suggested in this chapter, because it throws light on an especially influential but also contested field of language use (Durant and Lambrou, 2009). This area of stylistics is also interesting theoretically, in that it exposes for reflection a number of different facets of and approaches to stylistic investigation more widely.

The chapter begins by reviewing the general concept of ‘media stylistics’. We disentangle some of the polysemy of the two terms which, when combined, describe work in this area, and discuss some key themes and concerns which emerge. In brief commentary on two short extracts of media discourse in English, we elaborate a distinction between two alternative emphases: study of media language as concerned with general capabilities associated with changing technologies for conveying linguistic messages (e.g. language use in telegraphy, radio, or instant messaging); and study of media language as critical commentary on modern society’s dominant communication forms, which tend to take an electronic, ‘media’ form. In the first emphasis, media discourse has implications as regards the social functions of language and as regards social change (as Eisenstein (1979) and others have argued in relation to the advent of print in the Middle Ages, and as Ong (1982) has proposed for broadcast speech-as-a-kind-of-writing, or ‘secondary orality’, in the mid 20c). In the second emphasis, media language is viewed as a matter of linguistic resources used to communicate within an array of available contemporary media choices whose general existence is simply taken as a social fact. It would be easy to overstate such a distinction. So we also explore interaction between these different emphases, especially at the level of media ‘genres'.

In the formation of genres, patterns of linguistic choice are superimposed on a given technical infrastructure and history of media capabilities; distinctive media styles gradually evolve from each combination to serve specific and changing expressive and communicative purposes.

The 'media' and 'stylistics' in 'media stylistics'

Each of the two words that combine in the expression 'media stylistics' introduces complexity into how we understand this stylistic subfield. Let us consider each separately to begin with.

(i) *media*

The word *media* is used to describe many different kinds of contemporary discourse, including in an ever-increasing number of compounds and combinations. In some of those combinations, other words pre-modify *media* as indications of media-type (e.g. *analogue media*, *e-media*); other combinations use *media* as the modifier, indicating agents, functions, and consequences (e.g. *media blitz*, *media hype*, *media conglomerate*, *media revolution*). Such verbal creativity is common; less common, perhaps, is reflection on what precisely we mean when we use *media* itself in these ways.

The English word *media* has its origins in Latin 'medium', meaning 'middle', and comes into English in the late 16c. As applied to communication, early uses of 'medium' implied what is usually called a 'communication model' of language: a speaker addresses a hearer by means of a channel, 'in between', which carries a message from one to the other; roles are then reversed, as speaker becomes hearer (Mattelart and Mattelart, 1998). With a complicated social history surrounding them, the two linguistic modes, or 'mediums' (sometimes, carrying over the Latin plural, *media*), are in this conception speech and writing (Gelb, 1952; Goody, 1987; Briggs and Burke, 2005). As Raymond Williams (1983) shows in his *Keywords* entry for *media*, and as Katie Wales (2007) elaborates in her account of more recent changes in the word, *media* has changed in meaning subsequently and acquired new meanings closely linked to the social history of which it is part.

Simplifying considerably, three senses relevant to media stylistics are important. The first is the continuing sense of *media* as communication modes or channels, between

people or organisations. This sense has broadened, from writing through various forms of print publication such as newspapers and magazines into audio and audio-visual electronic formats including telegraph, telephone, film, television, radio and more recently a range of new digital media. Subject to shifts of spatialization, such *media* provide a foundation, vehicle or platform for achieving communicative purposes (including advertising, artistic expression, and propaganda). A second meaning emerges by metonymy applied to the first. Since the mid 20c (and earlier in an animate sense associated with spiritualism), *media* now also means people and institutions involved in production and ownership of the historically varying technological channels of communication denoted by the first sense. So for instance we have collective plural *media* denoting journalists, paparazzi, newsreaders and editors. A third strand of meaning introduces affective or symbolic loading into the other two meanings: *media* acquire a mythical character based either favourably on associations of celebrity, glamour and social influence, or unfavourably based on associations including sensationalism, intrusiveness, and manipulation. Each meaning, along with related strands in the word, could be analysed in greater depth. Their significance as range and alternative in the context of media stylistics is that what we look for when analysing 'media language' will vary, depending on which sense dominates in any given analysis or for a particular analyst.

(ii) stylistics

The other word in the expression 'media stylistics' - *stylistics* - is examined from different perspectives throughout this volume. As has long been recognised, the word's general difficulty is its relation to *style*. Two views in relation to media 'stylistics' are relevant. The first involves general description of 'style', widespread from the 1960s onwards (cf. Crystal and Davy (1969); O'Donnell and Todd (1980), and more recently Crystal (2006) and Biber and Conrad (2009)). On this understanding, style is a matter of the variables which function together to characterise often readily identifiable kinds of language use: for media, these are either kinds of media discourse in general, for instance in contrast with print publications, or some particular form or genre (such as the newspaper headline, e-mail, text message, TV documentary voice-over, or blog). This broad sense of *style* has been usefully sub-classified by Conrad and Biber (2009) as the combined effect of genre, register and style considerations, which may be

distinguished from one another on the basis on how pervasive or episodic particular features are, and whether they are functional or not. A contrasting view of stylistics foregrounds interpretation. It traces how discourse choices cause or at least shape the meanings a text conveys. For example, an analysis may show how a particular documentary voice-over exhibits racist overtones, how women were side-lined in a studio discussion, or how an e-mail thread conveys or fails to convey intimacy, distance, or respect. This sense comes closer to more general discourse analysis and critical interpretation found in literary and cultural studies. Nothing prevents descriptive and interpretive approaches combining, in the form of interpretive claims supported by linguistic evidence. Difficulties have been extensively discussed in the field, however, regarding how far textual elements may be thought to *determine* meaning, especially in the context of increased recognition of the importance of pragmatic strategies in assigning meaning (Fish, 1980).

(iii) media stylistics

When the words *media* and *stylistics* are combined as description of an approach to the analysis of the media, a number of alternative concerns and aims come into view. These can be tabulated in a somewhat simplified grid, as follows:

1a. examination of particular, individual texts	1b. examination of a selected corpus of texts, identifying pervasive features of the type of text represented by the sample
2a. investigation of media language aiming to enhance understanding of particular discourse features or techniques	2b. application of linguistic techniques in order to illuminate extra-linguistic, cultural or political topics (as for instance in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA))
3a. textual description	3b. textual interpretation (and assessment of textual effects)

Whether aspects are listed left or right in the two vertical columns does not imply preferred combinations. It is easily to imagine a study which looks at a single text in order to illuminate some cultural or political point. Equally, it is easy to conceive of a study of a corpus of texts designed to investigate particular linguistic features or techniques. What may be significant, however, is that the sense of 'interpretation', as an element of contrast in the third row, shifts both as regards *what* is being interpreted and also what such an interpretation *shows*, depending on which other two choices are made.

Survey and key concepts

Questions about the scope and ambitions of media stylistics may be treated as abstract, theoretical considerations (as they are in the above grid). But the range of approaches being addressed emerges from a particular historical formation, something that is felt most when work is read from different periods, or when wider aims and methods are generalised from particular studies.

For example, how the beginnings of media stylistics are dated will depend partly on the meanings given to the terms *media* and *stylistics* discussed above. If we take *media* to include 'speech' and 'writing', rather than only modern electronic media, then *all* stylistics is in some sense media stylistics. Stylistics on this understanding is closely intertwined with rhetoric, which has a 2500 year history ranging across both oratory (speech) and composition (writing). Stylistic studies inevitably investigate variation in relation to an overarching contrast between the two mediums: the dimension of register traditionally known in Halliday's three-way classification as 'mode' (Halliday 1978). In their 1960s study, Crystal and Davy even claim a central importance for considerations of medium (speech / writing) and participation (monologue / dialogue) as defining dimensions of media discourse (1969:68). Stylistic work can compare techniques used in the 'media' of speech and writing explicitly, or it must presume their general characteristics simply as a backdrop to more specific stylistic choices made *within* one medium or the other. With modern media, the second approach is problematic. Many such media exhibit complex crossover between characteristics associated with speech and with writing (e.g. in terms of production circumstances such

as simultaneity and co-presence of participants or spontaneity versus revision and editing; in terms of the durability or evanescence of the message; and in terms of the relative prominence of involvement strategies marked by first and second person pronouns, modal auxiliaries of subjective attitude, contractions, and hedging). This is a major significance of Naomi Baron's 'continuum' rather than 'opposition' view of speech and writing (Baron, 2000; 2008), and presents a challenge in law and social policy when questions are raised regarding what is speech and what is writing (e.g. for the purpose of distinguishing slander and libel). Different answers may be arrived at for film dialogue, live studio discussion, and Internet messaging, for instance.

What we tend now to think of as 'media stylistics' emerges most distinctly in the course of the 20th century. Concern was initially with the rise of influential *mass media*, from the 1920s onwards (radio, then early television), especially with how such media were affecting language use through increased influence of expanding 20th-century professions including advertising, political propaganda, and public relations (Briggs and Burke, 2005; L'Etang, 2004). Early exploration of media language can be found in work by writers in the tradition of General Semantics, for example, such as Chase (1938) and Hayakawa (1939), as well as in Osgood et al. (1957), whose efforts to 'measure meaning' extended into investigation of discourse fields including advertising. In Britain, Raymond Williams's *Communications* (1962), which related analysis of the changing broadcast environment of the time to both historical and theoretical perspectives on communication, is a notable, early British examination of modern forms of 'media' communication. Particularly influential internationally has been Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964), which includes among its essays an analysis of how technical capability and format (which are specific media attributes) affect not only the reach or circulation of a discourse but also its significance and implications: famously, in McLuhan's words, 'the medium is the message'.

During the later 1960s, as part of a significant growth in stylistic enquiry, work on media language can be found in for instance Leech's concern with the language of advertising (1966); in Crystal and Davy's (1969) early work on news reporting, and in a number of other writers. While some of this work was less critically engaged than earlier concern in General Semantics to expose discourse power as projected in Communism and Fascism, it was more systematically descriptive and linked more

closely with other fields of linguistic enquiry. Two generalisations might be made about subsequent lines of development. First, from an early focus on grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation there has been increased emphasis on topics in discourse analysis and pragmatics, leading for example to innovative studies of media speech participation and interaction (O'Keeffe, 2006), and, following Goffman (1981), of different speaker and hearer roles when production is by teams and comprehension is by large but internally varying audiences (Bell, 1991). Second, more detailed connections have been developed between the linguistics involved in media stylistics and social and political aspects of discourse circulation (for instance in investigations of power relations expressed in radio discourse (Hutchby, 1996); regarding ideology in general (Hodge and Kress, 1988), and to do with specific issues related to racism and gender discrimination (van Dijk, 1988).

Key topics and developing approaches

Two media forms in particular have been prominent in shaping present understanding of media stylistics: investigation of broadcast news (on radio and television) and investigation of adverts (usually in magazines or on television). Some features of the development of approaches to analysing each of these kinds of discourse are outlined below. Significant amounts of related work have also been undertaken on a third media format, broadcast media interviews (Bell and van Leeuwen, 1994; Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Montgomery, 2007), with studies covering in-depth news and analysis pieces, political studio discussion formats, and celebrity and chat show interviews.

News

Analysis of broadcast news discourse has been especially important because of the social significance of the format during the main period of mass broadcast media. From the 1940s until the 1990s a restricted number of media channels was generally available because of limited broadcast spectrum, which created a climate of special influence and contentiousness surrounding what was said in radio and television programming and created a bottleneck in public discourse that had to be addressed by regulation in the form of ownership controls, mandatory programme standards, and a complex concept of balance. Following the rise of satellite, cable and more recently

Internet TV, forms such as rolling 24-hour news and individualised newsfeeds to portable devices (e.g. smartphones) have challenged the dominance of broadcast news as the main public source of information and opinion, a historical position taken over from print media and radio. During the main period of centralised, mass broadcasting, however, radio and television news functioned -- as they still do in some circumstances -- as the main forum for negotiation of public meanings and values.

The news formats which developed in television news emerged out of earlier forms of radio news, propaganda films shown in cinemas, and before that print news, in a phenomenon McLuhan (1964) called 'rear mirrorism'. But the formats then developed in new directions. Alongside the political impact of its communicated content and reception, therefore, television news became of special interest to stylistics because of how its continuously developing techniques contributed to the formation of political ideology.

Within print media, one particular focus of study, especially in the early period of stylistics, has been on newspaper discourse (Reah, 2002), including newspaper headlines (Crystal and Davy, 1969; O'Donnell and Todd, 1980; Biber, 2003; Aitchison, 2007). According to Biber (2003), a 'dramatic' stylistic change occurred in the register of newspapers as a whole following the eighteenth and nineteenth century, when newspaper prose had been 'similar to academic prose in developing an increasingly dense use of passive verbs, relative clause constructions and elaborated nouns phrases' (2003:170). The shift Biber notes is towards a more oral style, achieved by changes including more marked use of first and second pronouns, contractions and phrasal verbs in an apparent effort to widen the appeal of newspapers. By means of a corpus-based study Biber identifies in linguistic patterns which make up newspaper prose, and especially headlines, a distinctive role played by compressed noun-phrase structures:

noun-noun sequence	*Meaning relationship*
air disaster	N1 expresses the location of N2
reprisal raid	N1 expresses the purpose of N2
etc	etc

As information is packed into fewer words - a phenomenon echoed in some commercial discourse types- Biber points out that the meaning relationship expressed by *noun-noun* sequences can lead to interpretive confusion or indeterminacy, even if readers are expected to draw on pragmatic knowledge to help them. Biber concludes his study with the view that, while newspapers have developed a more oral style, they have simultaneously been 'innovative in developing literate styles with extreme reliance on compressed noun-phrase structures' (2003:179).

Headline style of this kind might be thought to be merely an ornamental preference. Or alternatively, it might appear functional, depending on the view we take of the interrelation between information density, copy length, page layout, and ease of reading. Stylistic work is required first to research what the relevant patterns are, then how they have changed (e.g. by means of a time-series study), and then how they might be functional in virtue of an adapted suitability to production and reception conditions, or anticipated effects and uses.

With both print and broadcast news, much of the early stylistic interest centred on transitivity (Hodge and Kress, 1988; Fowler, 1991). Transitivity is concerned, effectively, with who does what to whom, as reflected in argument structures linked to verbs (for instance when the subject of an active verb is made an optional agent in a related passive construction that has made the object of that active construction the subject of the passive one). Different transitivity patterns make available alternative ways of depicting social agency in spheres of conflict, for instance conflict between police and unions; between different political parties; or between warring countries (Toolan, 2001). Work on this theme has grown into more complex studies of focalization, as well as wider critical linguistic studies of the ideological content of news texts, which Simpson (1993) points out is a 'central component of the critical linguistic creed' (1993:6). Related critical approaches to news texts include Clark's (1992) discussion of the representation of women in news, which applies a transitivity model to examine Violence towards women through the lens of how meaning is represented at the level of the linguistic clause.

As might be expected, news media continue to be a major topic in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Various linguistic levels in a text are correlated in this field with wider

socio-cultural dimensions of a news story, such as poverty, misery or social change. Fairclough (1995b) and van Dijk (2008) see CDA as what Fairclough calls a form of 'critical social research' (1995b:202), forging links between linguistics and social analysis in an effort to understand the power relations inherent in news discourse and to make transparent the ideologies of professional news practices.

Building further connection between professional news practices and linguistic style, Bell's (1991) study of news stories as narratives, developing earlier work by Galtang and Ruge (1973), explores the qualities that make a news story 'newsworthy'. Bell proposes a list of twelve features which serve as implicit editorial criteria: *NEGATIVITY, RECENCY, PROXIMITY, CONSONANCE, UNAMBIGUITY, UNEXPECTEDBNESS, SUPERLATIVENESS, RELEVANCE, PERSONALIZATION, ELITENESS, ATTRIBUTION* and *FACTICITY* (1991:156-8). He proposes that an action or event which contains more of these qualities, or only some of them but in a pronounced form, is more likely to be worthy of media attention than other kinds of story.

Studies such as Bell's, and Fairclough's, have had considerable influence on the concept of media literacy: the development in education of skills not only of understanding what is said in the media but why what is said is said, and whose interest such statements serve. Now that readers and viewers have access to vast numbers of news stories online and make extensive use of social media, however, they may wish to re-evaluate Bell's twelve features. Defining *news* in an era of blogs, Facebook posts and Twitter messages about everyday personal activities, and in a context of increased use by newspapers and broadcast media of amateur contributors, witnesses to events, and crowd-sourced material, is something Bednarek and Caple seek to do in *News Discourse* (2012: 2). It might be argued that, if the idea of news authors, then the critical agenda of media stylistics may also need to adapt. Researching linguistic underpinnings of balance and bias, for example -- with its valorisation of distortion and other kinds of deviation from such principles -- was an important feature of broadcast media in the pre-digital age. But such concepts, and the pressure towards negotiation of common public meanings implicit in them, may be less crucial in a multimedia news environment shaped by a more pluralistic 'marketplace of ideas', by online self-publication, and by user-chosen news feeds and algorithmic recommendation engines.

Adverts

An important parallel development in linguistic analysis of media discourse concerns the language of advertising. In fact, the phrase 'the language of advertising' provided the title of the influential linguistic study by Geoffrey Leech (1966) which set out to describe the main linguistic features of British television adverts of the mid-1960s. To take simply one illustration, Leech examined hyperbolic use of words in his sample of adverts and drew up a list of the twenty most frequent laudatory adjectives:

1 new	11 crisp
2 good/better/best	12 fine
3 free	13 big
4 fresh	14 great
5 delicious	15 real
6 full	16 easy
7 sure	17 bright
8 clean	18 extra
9 wonderful	19 safe
10 special	20 rich

Laudatory terms are significant in advertising, and Leech's study asks what those terms are and how they are used. As with news, two major directions follow from such early descriptive research. The first involves extension in the range and complexity of linguistic features taken into account. The themes of Leech's work, for example, have been extended into an accessible and comprehensive exposition by Myers (1994), who identified creative linguistic devices such as sound patterning (alliteration, assonance, rhyme) , parallelism (lexical/ syntactical repetition), and catchy tunes and intonation, as well as innovative use of graphology including unpredictable spelling. Slightly earlier than Myers, Geis's influential study *The Language of Television Advertising* (1982) took

analysis of advertising claims in a different direction, bringing to bear principles of Gricean pragmatics and especially the notion of conversational implicature. Geis condemns use of poetic devices in adverts, including metaphor and metonymy, and draws particular attention to a disparity between logical / factual propositions and what is conveyed by looser, inferential interpretation. For example, he responds to a cereal advert that begins 'Mother Nature sweetens apples for two good reasons' with the judgement that 'Everything claimed is false, for there is no such thing as Mother Nature' (1982:88). A large number of studies have subsequently discussed the verbal styles of advertising (e.g. Cook, 2001; Goddard, 2002), focusing especially on advertising discourse that communicates promotional messages indirectly.

The second main direction in stylistic treatments of advertising, as with news, has been closer engagement between linguistic aspects of analysis and forms of sociocultural critique, foreshadowed by Williamson's analysis of gender in adverts (1978; see also Cook (2001) for a summary of Geis and Williamson). Myers's own second book on advertising (1999) is also a notably wider analysis of promotional language linked to a discussion of professional practice, bringing media stylistic investigation of adverts closer to the vast literatures on advertising in fields including marketing and media regulation (Preston, 1994; Durant, 2010).

In a further parallel with media news, advertising as an industry is currently undergoing a major upheaval in response to the rise of digital and online media. A great deal of advertising is migrating online, for example, and some of the attention-grabbing work performed in print by design and verbal artifice is now achieved algorithmically by advertising keywords (words which trigger adverts related to browser search terms). Many promotional functions are also fulfilled now by other, often oblique kinds of promotional activity, including staged events and public relations communications (Wernick, 1991). Much of the analysis developed in media stylistics so far, accordingly, may fit better with classic print and broadcast media advertising than with the challenges of a wider and rapidly changing field of commercial speech.

Digital media and multimodality

Arguably the two areas of stylistic study described above, news and adverts, should be thought of as products of a particular period of media and media institutions: a world of mass media broadcasting and large circulation print advertising which prevailed during the second half of the 20c. The media forms of this period were centre-periphery in character (i.e. mass address to a large, distributed audience, see McQuail and Windahl, 1993); this shaped the direction in which early stylistic work evolved, as is evident in the simultaneous concern with theories of reception and what are called New Audience Studies in media studies that began in the 1980s and 1990s (Morley, 1992). The impact of electronically-mediated communication since the 1980s may however be considered quite fundamental (Scollon and Levine, 2004). For instance, new media often have different and rapidly changing capabilities and characteristics: low entry-cost and technical proficiency required in production, extending access and text authorship; a delayering of editorial processes between initial composition and publication (sometimes affecting citizen journalism and celebrity tweets controversially); and varying authority associated with what is said, ranging from innocent error, through disguised commercial promotion, to passing off and fraud. Such new discourse structures pose a new challenge to ideas of media literacy; and rapid expansion of digital media may call for different terminology and forms of analysis more suited to what is often described as an information age, digital economy, or 'open society'.

One important research concern related to such developments is investigation of the texture of multimodal discourse. In such discourse, verbal text interacts with images, animation, voiceovers, and typography to create various levels of meaning that interact as effectively a single message. Illustrations of one kind or another have been part of newspapers since early in their history but the relationship and proportion between text and image in print news has gradually changed, especially with the development of new image-printing technologies (see Bednarek and Caple, 2012, who also provide a useful timeline of technological advances in photographic reproduction from the 1800s onwards). In online news, photo galleries, video clips, and hyperlinks to additional news images and photos - often with narration and music - and calculated to appeal to an audience accustomed to interactive engagement typified by use of recent technologies such as smartphones and iPads.

What response can media stylistics make to changes such as these? Multimedia involve new technical capabilities, especially a capacity to juxtapose and link text segments in different formats. Among the most influential research into such capabilities has been writing by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), who set out to analyse how, in multimodal communication, 'common semiotic principles operate in and across different modes, and [….] it is therefore quite possible for music to encode action, or images to encode emotion' (2001:1). By comparison with traditional linguistic approaches to textual meaning, in which meaning is thought of as articulated only once, Kress and van Leeuwen see multimodal texts as 'making meaning in multiple articulations'. They propose four domains of practice, or strata, in which meanings are constructed: discourse, design, production and distribution; and their work sets out a framework describing the relative prominence or salience of features in different contributing media. Further work in this area seems likely to be needed as increased attention is given to electronic multimedia texts not only in practical settings but also in professional and social contexts where critical discussion of their meanings and effects is necessary.

Two miniature examples

In this section, we look briefly at two short passages in order to illustrate a contrast we have drawn above: that between interest in media discourse which is influential simply because it is presented on a mediatized platform (on television, on screen as a web page or tweet, etc.) and media discourse as a kind of discourse whose existence in a particular media format itself has a bearing on the meaning and significance likely to be attributed to it.

Loose Women interview

The transcript below was made of one section from a popular daily current affairs programme, *Loose Women* (2011). It presents an informal interactional style commonly associated with 'this type of programme', where 'type of programme' is a broad description begging exactly a set of stylistic questions about what variables go into constituting a media format or genre. One question worth pursuing is whether the language used differs significantly from everyday face-to-face interaction: that is,

whether a style emerges that is specific to this variety of media discourse, while drawing on but also adapting prevailing conventions of face-to-face, 'non-media' spoken interaction.

Interview from "Loose Women" (ITV1), presented by Andrea McClean (AMc) with panel members Carol McGiffin (CMc), Denise Welch (DW) and Cilla Black (CB) (May 2011). The guests on the show are sisters Sam and Billy Faiers, stars of the docusoap/ reality television show "The Only Way is Essex" (commonly abbreviated as TOWIE)

Line	Speaker	
1	AMc	*(Directly to camera)* What do these three following words have in common?
2	CMc	Sha-up
3	DW	Well jel
4	CB	Vajazzle
5		*(Laughter and clapping from audience)*
6	AMc	Now these are three catchphrases from a docusoap that has made stars out
7		of our next two guests. Who would've thought that a small county to the East
8		of London would have had such an effect on our lives. Now that the second
9		series has come to an end we're all in mourning for T*he Only Way is Essex*.
10		Let's take a look at what the fuss is about. *(Shows clip from the show)*.
11	AMc	Please welcome Sam and Billy Faiers.
12	All	*(Clapping and cheering from the audience and panel)*
13	AMc	Hello girls, hello, nice to see you. Now the second series is over how does
14		that feel to have it behind you?
15	Sam	It's been really good hasn't it *(to Billy)* it's been amazing
16	Billy	Yeah we're we're just sort of I dunno it's been mad at the moment it's been
17		lots of press and this an that
18	AMc	And do they film quite close up to transmission?
19	Billy	Yeah it's like they do three days filming and then the show's on the air on
20		Wednesday then we'll be filming for the Sunday episodes so a really really
21		quick turnaround
22	AMc	Okay
23	CMc	Now Sam you're you're a bit more used to it I suppose cause you're in the
24		first series and Billy you're new to the second. How how are you getting on
25		with it?
26	Billy	Yeah I'm really enjoying it it's been so much fun

27	CMc	I mean it's bigger I mean you can't go anywhere now really cause everybody
28		knows who you are
29	Billy	Everyone recognises you do get recognised
30	Sam	Yeah
31	Billy	I fink you get we get recognised a lot together
32	Sam	Yeah
33	Billy	Cause I still feel like I'm not I'm not famous I feel like no-one's going to
34		recognise me cause we're only in the second series I don't I dunno it's weird
35		isn't it? *(To Sam)*

Table [xx] Transcript from Loose Women television programme.

As a stretch of spoken media discourse, the above excerpt can be analysed at different levels, by applying linguistic frameworks and models also deployed in investigating non-mediated, face-to-face discourse. Topics might include:

- interactional style, using Conversation Analysis, perhaps with a special focus on turn-taking, adjacency pairs, or topic changes
- features of a conventional interview as a speech event, using frameworks developed in the ethnography of speaking
- dialect, register and style considerations, focusing on non-Standard English and register changes
- lexical deviation, such as *vajazzle* (neologism) and *well jel*: words foregrounded by their use in the introductory remarks and by the applause that follows them)
- lexical cohesion, including semantic fields (e.g. reflexive use of 'media' terminology such as *second series*; *on air*, *transmission* etc., and celebrity terminology such as *all the fuss, lot of press*, *famous*, *recognise me*)

Both the guests and the chat show panel members in this extract make extensive use of non-standard speech patterns which resemble face-to-face conversational style. Despite this apparently informal structure, however, interaction still keeps to the question-answer format of an interview. The presenter dominates as main interviewer (ll.1,6,11,13,18) and another member of the panel takes over this role two thirds of the way through (ll.23,27). What does such a mix of styles suggest? There is no apparent style-shift by the guests to a more formal register, as might be thought conventional in a

televised interview. Their use of *dunno* (l.16), *fink* (l.31) and *yeah* (ll.26,30,32) suggests preference for their everyday vernacular, despite being in the studio. At the same time, it will be noted that the guests are known for their 'Essex' dialect (Essex is a county to the East of London, associated with a variety of English known as Estuary English). Foregrounding dialect features is not only indexical, however, reflecting social origins; it forms part of the media identity of the interviewees, and both maintain this identity through use of linguistic markers of place and class. Moreover, recognition by both panel members and audience of particular words associated with the programme *The Only Way is Essex* (such as *sha-up* (l.2), *well jel* (l.3) and the neologism *vajazzle* (l.4)) suggests shared common knowledge between all the participants in this speech event that is media-specific, in referring both to the status of the speakers as TV personalities and to the style and mood of the programme in which they appear.

This brief example begins to show how media discourses can draw selectively on speech styles to create nuanced registers matched to programme type and audience expectations: news, chat show, reality programme, sports commentary, etc. The development of such styles involves both technical and linguistic processes: in this case, a long-term shift in television discourse from formal public address to acceptance of non-standard linguistic forms and more intimate forms of on-screen conversation. Such genre formation involves several factors simultaneously: a changing, relative embeddedness and accessibility of media technologies in everyday life (such that watching TV may be an individual online activity, a family activity with everyone sitting in front of the television, or background viewing in a public place such as a waiting room or bar); the relative rarity or ordinariness involved in participating in a given media format (as a changing mix of professional and amateur participants in a broadcast programme); and changing conventions governing performance of public and private personality (including observance and breaking of social taboos). Importantly, this history of media style formation is not finished, but rather undergoing a volatile and rapid period of continuing change.

Joke or threat? A tweet that led to prosecution

In January 2010 Paul Chambers, a 27 year old trainee accountant, was arrested, convicted and fined after tweeting a message out of frustration at airport delays. He had

been due to meet his girlfriend but found that his local airport was closed, and tweeted the following to 600 followers (Twitter is an online social networking service which allows users to text short messages, or 'tweets', to the public):

> Crap! Robin Hood airport is closed. You've got a week and a bit to get your shit together otherwise I'm blowing the airport sky high!!

Chambers was prosecuted in May 2010 (under section 127(1) of the Communications Act 2003, which prohibits sending 'by means of a public electronic communications network a message or other matter that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character'). In arriving at its judgment, the court had to decide whether Chambers' electronic communication represented a credible and serious threat. Airport staff did not believe it was. Doubt as to the seriousness of such a verbally direct threat nevertheless raised the question of what could make it acceptable to appear to threaten in the medium of Twitter, when the same words used in a different context would be likely to have more serious consequences.

In Chambers' defence, it was argued that his words were a joke, as if said out loud to friends, rather than a genuine threat of violent action. The defendant's use of expletive swear words, for example – *crap* and *shit* - reflects a type of language typically used casually in face-to-face interaction, rather than in a public forum. Other aspects of the language used suggest pastiche, as ironic self-dramatization as a filmic 'avenging angel' character, working to the loose schedule of 'a week and a bit'. Interpretations along such lines appeal to an audience's perception of echoic reference in the discourse style, which tweet followers might view as citing rather than using language choices with direct intent.

During the case a number of well-known comedians and television presenters, who viewed the case as absurd and a threat to free speech, rallied in support of Chambers. In July 2012, he won his appeal and his conviction was overturned. The import of the verdict remains complicated, nevertheless. While to many it seemed a triumph of common sense, the appeal verdict suggests that even in cases where important issues of security and public safety could be at stake, comments may still be considered harmless if interpreted in the specialised context of online social media communication.

The import of this brief illustration for stylistics is more straightforward. Some degree of sensitivity needs to be exercised in assessing linguistic practices in a rapidly changing electronic communication environment. The tweet is not only a technical format that can be described in terms of its maximum number of characters (140), but a format whose linguistic style and existence within a wider genre of tweets plays a part in determining *what it means*. Other areas in which similar considerations arise include how to deal with celebrity tweets which present themselves as personal messages but function as a new zone of unregulated advertising; and assessment of the point at which online messages become defamatory statements rather than ill-judged expressions of honest comment in an online climate of increasingly robust, personalised review that goes beyond 'like' and 'dislike'. Such questions will in the long term not only be topics for special consideration by online communities and regulators. Gradually online discourse styles have a knock-on effect on the repertoire of choices available in print media and other public forms of face-to-face discourse.

Conclusion: What can stylistics tell us about media language?

Across its contributing sub-fields, the potential application and usefulness of different kinds of stylistic work varies. Analysis of a particular text can help a reader to clarify his or her interpretation, by linking meaning to detailed formal description which functions as discussable evidence. Stylistic commentary can draw attention to techniques that the reader of the analysis, once aware of, will notice in future in other texts. In this respect, stylistic analysis contributes to development of new kinds of media literacy.

Stylistic analysis of a corpus of media texts, selected to represent a media *genre*, can also contribute to a wider debate about the relationship between technological forms of communication and social behaviour. Prominent among the questions to be addressed are issues to do with habits of reading (of short or long stretches of text, of pages in print and on-screen, and in audio-book format); and whether language as a social form of exchange and interaction is now directed less towards agreement over, or at least negotiation of, common meanings by the proliferation of personalised, on-demand electronic communication formats.

In an influential discussion of how to analyse media language, Fairclough (1995a) proposes that it should be 'an objective of media education to ensure that students can answer four questions about any media text' (1995a:201). Fairclough's questions require that students should be able to compare and contrast media text design, a text's production and interpretation, what he calls its order of discourse, and wider sociocultural processes such as the text's likely effects. The first two of these questions have virtually the same force now as they did when Fairclough formulated them, even if answers will differ as a result of both technological and genre changes affecting the media landscape he was discussing. To Fairclough's important questions for students, however, media stylisticians should add another: what new issues need to be defined as we move on from analysis of the linear, broadcast era into contemporary social media and a world of time-shifted and on-demand programming rather than centrally broadcast live or scheduled content?